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ABSTRACT

Peter Medway recounts the beginnings of the language across the curriculum (LAC) movement in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s when teachers were troubled by their encounters with bright but non-academic working-class children who failed in school and yet whose verbal resourcefulness and fertility were an inescapable fact. Thus teachers were led to the conclusion that the failure of this group should not be ascribed to slowness or dullness but rather to "a discontinuity between two sorts of language. theirs and the school's." This thumbnail sketch of the British expressivist writing movement recovers the social activist roots of the expressivist movement--something that has been lost in conceptualization of the classroom community as a "safe place" where the uniqueness of the student's voice can be heard through his or her rendering of "experience" and "authenticity." Given the greater depth of thinking about difference that multicultural and postcolonial theory has made available, post-process pedagogies can no longer equate official voices and knowledge with the voice of the teacher. An illustration of one student essay shows one approach to teaching expressivist writing--encouraging students to tell stories as a means of articulating the different ways they align themselves with and against social norms and mainstream thinking. One aim of such an approach is to recognize the self as always emerging from an interaction between cultures. (TB)

Rhetoricizing the Teacher's Position: Or What to Make of the Ghost of "Process" in Multicultural Pedagogies

By Dan Mahala and Jody Swilky

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Why do our students enter our classrooms with widely differing senses of their own entitlement to speak? How do teachers reproduce, disrupt or redistribute such entitlements? In many ways, early expressivist pedagogies can be read as responses to such questions. As Peter Medway recounts the beginnings of the language across the curriculum (LAC) movement in Britain in the 50s and 60s, LAC teachers were troubled by their encounters with "bright but non-academic working-class children who failed in school and yet whose verbal resourcefulness and fertility were an inescapable fact." Thus these teachers were led to the conclusion that "the failure of this group could in no way be ascribed to slowness or dullness" but rather to "a discontinuity between two sorts of language, theirs and the schools" (154). The well-known pedagogical response of the British expressivists, disseminated to the U.S. through the 1966 Dartmouth seminar and other avenues, was the integration of more "native" student talk and writing, more "expressive" language into the curriculum. Less wellrecognized was that many of the British expressivists regarded their work not as as a romantic defense of child-philosophers but as, in Medway's words, "a human rights issue" (157). The goal was to make "the dice less heavily loaded against ... bright working class children" in education (157).

The point of this thumbnail sketch of British expressivism is not to champion Medway's working class populism. Rather, it is to recover currents of social activism underlying some expressivist pedagogies that have been mostly hidden in current re-evaluations of our history. Indeed, many American writing

teachers are most familiar with expressivism through isolated techniques and genres associated with its development - journals, learning logs, the personal essay - or through the rhetoric of "process writing" with its characteristic focus on the classroom community as a "safe place" where the uniqueness of individual student voices can emerge. The so-called social turn of composition theory in the 1980s has revealed the limitations of this view of writing, but has done little to reactivate progressive political interests that remain latent in the rhetorics of voice, of experience, and of expression, which continue to be widespread in American schools and colleges. As David Bartholomae states in the recently published debate between himself and Peter Elbow (dramatic personae of the social turn and expressivism respectively): "[t]he open classroom; and free writing... [are] an expression of a desire for an institutional space free of institutional pressures, a cultural process free from the influence of culture, an historical moment outside of history, an academic setting free from academic writing" (64). Yes, freewriting, the script of utopia ... but does Medway's description of expressivism propose a suspension of historical determinants? Or is it calling for, as we would suggest, a specific redistribution of power between historical discourses and social groups?

The familiar oppositions that have long oriented us towards our expressivist history - between individual and community, personal and public writing, freedom and necessity - do not seem adequate when we consider that history in its contradictory embodiments. However, the recent 'social turn' in composition theory has as often reinscribed such oppositions by envisioning the move beyond process as 'a doing away with' rather than a working through of the contradictions of expressivism. Instead of working through contradictions, it has been easier to caricature the "independent, selfcreative, self-expressive subjectivity" (Bartholomae 65) valorized by some process

theories. And such simplifications of the legacy of expressivism have opened the way for reinscriptions of the teacher, and of professional discourse communities, in terms that simply reproduce the dominant traditions of Western instrumental rationality. Thus, for example, John Trimbur's recent review essay "Taking the Social Turn: Teaching Writing Post-Process" hunts down the "residual pull of process pedagogy" on new multicultural pedagogies, only to reinscribe the teacher in conventional figures of moral leadership and enlightenment. Thus, following Bizzell, Trimber presents teachers as bearers of "civic virtue" or the "common good" which can now be argued to students with less fear of, in Trimbur's words, "simply overpower[ing] students and prompt[ing] either insincere compliance or resistant silence" (112).

However, instead of hunting down the residues of process pedagogy, we might be better served by examining contradictions inhering in the legacy of process, and then reconsidering concepts of self and experience in the framework of the dynamics of identity and difference that multicultural and postcolonial theory offers us. For instance, returning to Medway's account of LAC, we might ask: how can expressivist traditions privilege the authority of the individual's voice and experience as seemingly universal constructs, and at the same time champion, as Medway does, the authority of particular, historically neglected voices, of particular subjugated knowledges? What might it mean to think of expression and voice not in terms of a universal subject, but in terms of students' specific historical crossings and remarkings of the borders between self and "others"? Can the classroom ever be made "a safe place" in the midst of such assertions and reformations of cultural identity, and if so, for whom?

One of the myths of expressivist pedagogy that needs to be unpacked concerns its use of a rhetoric of authenticity and experience to evade scrutiny

of its effects on the formation of speaking subjects. As Lester Faigley contends, the history of writing instruction in America suggests that "writing teachers have been as much interested in who they want their students to be as in what they want their students to write" (396). But what does it mean to desire students to write "from experience" as "authentic" subjects, or with "real voice"? And when teachers identify in practice which writing expresses authenticity and which doesn't, what boundaries on the map of social identities are inscribed? What specific cultural identifications, what forms of resistance are rewarded or denied? The commonplace answer to this question is: "we ask students to say what they really think and feel." But this response evades scrutiny about who we want our students to be because it positions voice and agency, what a student "really thinks and feels" as phenomena that exist prior to articulation, rather than as effects of articulation. The student comes to us with what he or she "really thinks and feels" as a given, or freely self-created legacy, and teachers only help students give it expression. And so, regarding the formation of subjects, we keep our hands clean.

By comparison, the rhetoric of authenticity on the scene of multicultural pedagogy carries a quite different range of resonances. It is difficult to displace or deny the historical constructedness of discourse that claims an ethnic or racial authenticity, however idealized or essentialist. Where an earlier era might have denied such constructedness by appeals to biological essences, such claims are now recognized as transparently racist. Hence, appeals to authenticity and the "authority of experience" inevitably draw us onto the shared and contested terrain of history, of group identity and conflict.

Early British expressivism acknowledged this political affiliations, such as Medway's identification of some students' "native

language" with that of the working class. In this context, the argument for more "expressive language" in the schools was an argument for curricular revision to include more representations of working class culture, and not only about pedagogical methods. As Medway put it, "if a particular content does not lend itself to being 'handled' in the expressive language of ordinary pupils in such a way that it yields rewarding insights, what business has it in a curriculum that is supposed to be open to all?" (156). However, even in this brief passage, we see a subtle denaturing of politics in Medway's substitution of "ordinary pupils" for "working class students." Even in this simple substitution, the class position of the expressive subject becomes hidden in favor of a generically individual, an "ordinary," subject.

We find a similar denaturing of politics in James Britton's advocacy of more expressive discourse in schools. In Britton's theory, the expressive function of language was defined in terms of a specific type of social relationship between subjects. The expressive function was most likely dominant where the speaker could assume that the listener would be as interested in the speaker as the topic, and would understand the context of her utterance. In the assumed context of teaching working class students, this relationship of care for students' experience enabled the surfacing of class interests that had not conventionally been recognized in schools. However, by naming such interests in terms of generic functions of language, Britton also masked the class politics of LAC. Thus this formulation invited appropriations of expressivism that replaced the historically positioned subject with a generically individual one.

However, if working through the contradictions of expressivism entails a dimension of critique, it also entails borrowing and rethinking expressivist concerns, such as with making participatory spaces for the sharing of

knowledge, spaces that are not simply dominated by official voices and knowledges. If this is a "utopian" endeavor, as Bartholomae would have it, it is not necessarily simplistically or naively so. Given the greater depth of thinking about difference that multicultural and postcolonial theory has made available to us, post-process pedagogies can no longer equate official voices and knowledges with the voice of the teacher. As bell hooks has recently put it, "racism, sexism, and class elitism shape the structure of classrooms, creating a lived reality of insider versus outsider that is predetermined, often in place before any class discussion begins. There is rarely any need for marginalized groups to bring this binary opposition into the classroom because it is usually already operating" (83). The lived reality of insider and outsider that hooks is describing here is by no means contained within the dualism of academic and and non-academic discourses so often invoked to justify the disciplining of the basic writer, her so-called "initiation" into the discourses of the academy. Indeed, arguments based on the "authority of experience" generate their own insiders and outsiders, and not only, as hooks emphasizes, in the stereotypical case where a student from a mariginal group, say a black woman, claims, in essentialist terms, exclusive knowledge of black female experience. Essentialist claims about experience are just as often expressed from "locations of privilege" (see hooks 81-82), as when, say, a white male student assumes authority to speak from experience, with few qualifications, about "human nature."

But if speaking from experience is so problematic, what specifically can be recouped from expressivist practices that privilege experiential knowledge? One answer to this question is that there is nothing wrong with teachers positioning themselves in receptive, facilitative roles in the classroom, with creating spaces for storytelling, so long as teachers initiate examination of the "authentic selves" that emerge *as* cultural articulations. Thus, instead of

reifying students as simple reflections of the dominant culture, (or offering them a range of academically sanctioned ways for understanding experience) teachers might assist students in illuminating the ways multiple cultural discourses, including the discourse of authenticity, inflect experience. All of us identify with the dominant culture, and are represented within it in different ways. As Raymond Williams has explained, the struggle for identity formation can be a "long and difficult remaking of an inherited (determined) practical consciousness," a remaking that proceeds not by expelling ideology or dominant culture, but rather by "confronting a hegemony in the fibers of the self and in the hard practical substance of continuing and effective relationships" (212).

This confrontation does not proceed by imagining that our individual experiences or loyalties are somehow outside of institutions of knowledge, the mass media, or any of the other traditions, institutions and formations that constitute a hegemony. Rather, the rewriting of expressivism we are proposing might examine experience by juxtaposing our identifications with the dominant culture with our struggle to define ourselves as distinct from it. No one is completely outside the dominant culture, even those individuals who perceive themselves aligned primarily with marginal cultures because the identities of such cultures can be "made only in relation to a full sense of the dominant" (Williams 123). We all experience, though in different degrees, what W. E. B. Dubois called "twoness," somehow being, and often in asymmetrical ways, participants in the dominant culture, even if we also are part of groups that are commonly seen as marginalized or oppositional.

This approach to writing instruction encourages students to tell stories as a means of articulating the different ways they align themselves with and against social norms and mainstream thinking. One aim of such an approach

is to recognize the self as always emerging from an interaction between cultures. Such a process can begin with students telling stories in the context of exploring the construction of identity in lived experience. It also could begin with students reading multicultural texts that dramatize or theorize the self as a product of cultural interaction, to which students could respond with their own stories.

Whatever the point of departure, or whatever ways readings are used to complicate this process, we would argue that teachers' response to stories must avoid reifying the student as a simple reflex of the dominant culture with its "politically incorrect" class-, race- or gender-based biases. Instead of simply pointing out who the student is, or "who [we] want the student to be," teachers might regard students' stories as acts of ideological becoming. They might regard students' stories as attempts to continually compose new resolutions to the conflicts between the multiple discourses and logics that have informed students' lives and writing.

To illustrate this point, we will now turn to a student's writing, a section of her response to an assignment that asked her to connect her experience to her reading of how gender is constructed in fairytales and television programs. After explaining how fairytales such as "Snow white and the Seven Dwarfs" and sitcoms such as "Married with Children" reinforce sexist stereotypes of women by representing female beauty as a sign of naivete, stupidity or dependence on men, Kris extends her analysis to how she herself is a "gendered body" in the workplace:

> The fairy tales, televisions shows, and advertisements are all a fantasy but they want the average American to believe they're true. ...In all actuality, if a smart woman who was dressed risque went to a company for a job requiring extensive knowledge and hard work, she would probably not be taken seriously. Her physical resemblance of a "bimbo" would most likely flood the minds of the interviewers of the company,

thus hindering her chances of her getting the job. It seems as if sexiness of a woman is not respected expecially if she carries it too far.... In most offices a woman's hemline can not be higher than where her hands reach down her side in a standing position. This seems fair. ... There are those who abuse or overuse what they were born with and deserve to be labeled.

I have found myself on both ends of the spectrum. I believe one should use what they have to their own advantage. Then there are people who have relied on their bodies or beauty all their lives and don't know any other way. Using your God -given assets to your advantage must be done carefully. This can't be over accentuated or it will cause doubt in your real talents. For instance, I am a waitress at a neighborhood bar. There is a generalization put on this position. People tend to believe that a waitress is dingy. It is a very public job and you must be friendly and bubbly ; in turn, people like you and tip better. Along with that is how you look. The cuter you are, the more money you will make. Another big determination is dress. It is proven that on a given day the shorter of shorts worn will result in bigger tips. This is all acceptable until there is actual in-depth conversation. Then people are shocked to find out that being a waitress is not my life long goal. They seem very surprised that I am attending school to attain a degree in Accounting. Only then do they see me for more than surface and respect me. On the other hand, a co-worker fits in the generalization of a waitress. She is very cute, flaunts herself, and certainly shows off what she has ... She is not trying to better her life; she is only working there to meet men. The belief again, she's cute and a man will come take care of her.

A woman in today's society must change the perception of a beautiful woman. ... If a woman uses her looks to help get her somewhere, she still needs to be able to use her brains to remain there. The world is a very competitive place and we all need to make ourselves appear better than another to win.... If society would change the teaching that beauty is accompanied by ignorance and dependency then many people would not be as confused. The idea that a beautiful woman must be taken care of because she can't do it for herself hurts those who are beautiful yet smart and independent and they in turn must work harder to prove this is not so in all pretty people.

Responding to Kris's essay, we would attempt to help her focus on the complications of the self that emerge when she experiences herself "at both ends of the spectrum," a self actively indentified with and opposed to the dominant culture's representation of female beauty. For instance we might highlight the way she constructs herself as both using the dominant culture's sexist imagery of woman on her own behalf and as struggling against the limits imposed by this particular form of subjectivity. As a waitress, she gains better

tips by shortening her skirt, but she also imagines herself in settings requiring "extensive knowledge" where, if the hemline is too high, she would "not be taken seriously." Thus she constructs herself in multiple locations: as the waitress who justly uses "god-given assets" to make a living, and as the woman unjustly marked by others who read beauty as signs of superficiality, incompetence and passivity. Imagining herself dehumanized by such significations, she vows to rewrite them: "a woman in today's society must change the perception of a beautiful woman."

As teachers we might help Kris advance and recognize problems in this project. For instance, we might question her association of "bettering yourself" as a woman, being more than superficial, with becoming professional middle class. What about the waitress whose decision not to pursue a professional "career" is not a sign of superficiality? Is the project of "chang[ing] the perception of a beautiful woman" limited by conceiving it individualistically, something "a woman" must do? The aim of our response would be to incite something like what Bakhtin calls "critical interanimation of languages," a process in which "ideological systems and approaches to the world ... contradict each other and in no way [can] live in peace and quiet with one another," which presents "the necessity of actively choosing" a language orientation (295-96).

We would like to redefine storytelling not as it is articulated by "social turn" theorists such as Trimbur who view storytelling as "the prose of personal experience" derived from the "rhetoric of the belletristic tradition" (110), and in opposition to the "rhetorical engagements of argument" (112). Understanding storytelling in terms of its connections to the personal essay or its differences from argumentation ignores its uses for opening participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge. Such uses, we would argue, are not only evident in

British expressivist pedagogy, but are being elaborated in new ways in current postcolonial theory, poststructural feminism, and in studies of literacy such as Mike Rose's Lives on the Boundary. Such writing reclaims and redefines the concepts of the personal and experience. "Storytelling is," writes Trinh Minh-ha, "the oldest form of building historical consciousness in community" (148). In Jane Tompkins work of the late 1980s, telling stories and making the personal political redefined her subjectivity, as she "'unlearned' to write the critical essay," yet all along combined critical analysis with narrative so much so that her work might have been called critical narrative (see for instance "Me and My Shadow").

As bell hooks notes, "[t]he complexity of experience can rarely be voiced and named from a distance" (91). However, if it is difficult to name experience from the distance created by the conventions of critical discourse, experience is no refuge from criticism or history. Hegemony does not stop at the doors of our classrooms, but lives, as hooks puts it, within "the fiber of us and our students." Our stories are that fiber, that lived reality, containing both the unconscious history that has composed us, and the conscious memory that enables us to compose our future. In re-writing the legacy of process, let us not miss the opportunity of reclaiming such memory, and of critically reanimating the many voices that have made us what we are.